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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
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SUBJECT: FM SPANTA, NSC DIRECTOR RASSOUL DISCUSS WAY AHEAD
WITH A/S BOUCHER

Classified By: DCM Dell, Reason 1.5 b and d

11. (SBU) In Kabul on November 8, Assistant Secretary Boucher met separately with Foreign Minister Spanta, National Security Council Director Rassoul, and Presidential Chief of Staff Daudzai to focus on improving governance and fighting corruption as the U.S. goes through the transition and Afghans prepare for elections. See action request at paragraph 10.

PLANNING NEXT STEPS

12. (C NF) Dr. Rassoul ticked off three "lessons learned" for building democracy in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban. First, the shared success of the international community and the Afghan government in building up functioning institutions should increasingly translate into Afghan leadership in decision-making. Second, good governance will continue to be crucial; "where we have good governors, and good chiefs of police," Rassoul mused, "everything has changed." Third, "bad justice," including corruption and poor policing, is an important source of popular dissatisfaction and an area where the combination of greater Afghan effort and more international aid can make a difference.

13. (C NF) In their separate meeting, Spanta underscored to Boucher that the U.S. and Afghanistan share a common goal: a strong, democratic state in Afghanistan. The past seven years of sacrifice of Americans and Afghans fighting in Afghanistan, Spanta noted, has been for democratic values, and the U.S. election is an excellent demonstration of these values. A skeptic on reconciliation, Spanta noted that the Taliban, of course, do not share these values.

EXTENDING GOVERNANCE

14. (C NF) The main cause of the lack of peace and security, said Spanta, is the lack of a strong democratic government. In Helmand, the only places under the control of the Afghan government are where "your Marines" are.

15. (C NF) US Marine operations in Garmsir, Rassoul said, have closed the door to the insurgents. The Afghan National Security Council judges that cross-border attacks have significantly decreased in the east, while in Farah Taliban are complaining they cannot re-supply their forces with funds or ammunition. We need good police, Rassoul said, and new Interior Minister Atmar is under pressure to deliver results.

DEFINING RECONCILIATION

¶16. (C NF) Spanta acknowledged that Karzai is very interested in weaning away fighters who do not share the Taliban ideology. To Spanta, reconciliation is part of the struggle against terrorism, and must come from a position of strength, with criteria for discussion. Spanta is, however, dubious about some of the present initiatives, and believes certain players in the international community are underestimating the scope of change within Afghan society. "The main discourse of the tribal elders who still influence public opinion," he sighed, "is still what kind of clothes women wear. My father wore a kilt, but I do not."

LOOKING AT ELECTIONS

¶17. (C NF) The field of candidates will sort out in March, Rassoul predicted. All the major challengers to the President are Pashtuns, and Karzai has a stronger base with other ethnic groups than any of his rivals, said Rassoul confidently. The United Front will choose a candidate, perhaps former president Rabbani (Tajik) or former Northern Alliance spokesman Abdullah Abdullah (Tajik.) Kabul-based Hazara leader Mohaqqueq and the Uzbek strongman Dostum can get out as many as a million disciplined votes each, and will be looking to see "which way to go," or to form an alliance. Participation of the south and east are very important for

KABUL 00003006 002 OF 002

the legitimacy of the election, and security in these areas will be key. Last time, Rassoul said, cross-border attacks stopped "like a clock" one month before voting day; although the situation in Pakistan is now different, the new government still can help.

DEALING WITH PAKISTAN AND THE REGION

¶18. (C NF) In their respective meetings, Rassoul and Spanta each politely underscored that Afghanistan -- not its international partners -- leads its bilateral and regional diplomacy. The regional context has changed a lot, Rassoul noted. If things go out of control in Pakistan, we are in trouble. Or, if Pakistan cooperates with us in fighting terrorists, it will eliminate the roots of this problem. If the Pakistani government moves on the Quetta shura, as they certainly can, Rassoul hypothesized, that will show us their hand.

¶19. (C NF) Spanta said that in the past five months, with Pakistan's new government, Afghan-Pakistani bilateral relations were much improved, a view Rassoul shared. Spanta and Rassoul both said they were eager to translate the new positive atmosphere into concrete achievements, and cited a number of coming meetings planned with their counterparts. Security cooperation, a new transit trade agreement, border crossing control mechanisms, modernized customs laws, cross-border dialog among community leaders, and an understanding on refugee returns were areas where technical cooperation promises to cement a better relationship, the Foreign Minister explained.

¶10. (C NF) Iran, however, is less cooperative. Iran officially does not forcibly repatriate Afghan refugees, but still sends back thousands of Afghans daily, mostly young men at work in the economy. The metro in Tehran is being built by Afghan labor, Spanta noted. Iran, along with Turkmenistan, is pressing Afghanistan on its projects for damming the Herat river. The Foreign Minister requested U.S. support for World Bank and Central Asian development funding for its water

projects in the north, along the Uzbekistan border. ACTION: Department please pass Spanta's request to appropriate offices and agencies for their attention.

11. (C NF) In these meetings, as well as the one-on-one with Daudzai, Boucher stressed the need for near-term steps to strengthen governance, support the new Interior Minister, and demonstrate clear progress against corruption. Visible steps, Boucher argued, would have multiple benefits. First, they would respond to public expectations as Afghans think about elections next year. Second, concrete steps can strengthen the government's hand in picking off pieces of Taliban locally and pressing for broader reconciliation. Third, it will take real action to impress the new U.S. administration and to get off on the right foot.
WOOD